

## NEW PUBLICATIONS.

## MEDIAEVAL FRANCE.

**THE STORY OF MEDIAEVAL FRANCE.** By Gustave Masson, B. A. 12mo, pp. 354. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The title page of M. Masson's story of medieval France states that the period dealt with is "from the reign of Hugues Capet to the beginning of the eighteenth century." This is evidently a mistake; it should have read "to the beginning of the sixteenth century." Even then it is a strain upon the conventional significance of the phrase to imply that all this is in the history of the Middle Ages, though, of course, there is no arbitrary line of demarcation. Mr. Masson in his work undertook a difficult task, and one from its nature scarcely susceptible of satisfactory treatment. Mediaeval France is really a subject the breadth and depth of which demand fulness of space for the handling of it, and here it had to be dealt with after some fashion in a small volume of between three and four hundred pages. The author's capacity is not questionable, but his limitations hamper and embarrass him seriously, and compel him repeatedly to confine himself to sketchy outlines where anything like clear comprehension must depend upon full statement. His anxiety to say something of every important topic leads him to attempt more than can be carried out in the circumstances, and one effect of this is to give the book a fragmentary aspect which is calculated to detract from its literary interest.

Broadly considered, the history of mediaeval France is that of progress from feudalism to autocracy; but a non-natural progress, inasmuch as it left wholly out of the account the people of France. In all the ceaseless wars, great and little, which maintained a state of fermentation through the Middle Ages, the feudal lords and the kings carried on their quarrels and intrigues without regard to the fate of Jacques Bonhomme. To-day, the natural impulse of the student is to pierce beyond the surface records of feudal and autocratic movements, and find out how the masses lived, and what they thought or hoped or purposed during these dark ages. Little light, however, has been thrown upon them save in their sufferings. We know that whether king or nobles wanted, it was the peasant who had to pay. We know that whether civil war or foreign invasion harried the land, it was the peasant who felt the devastation most keenly and longest. We know that while the city burghers presently learned how to draw strength from organization, and by guild and commune checked the greed of the feudal lords, the peasant was the last to find protection. We see him dimly bending under his crushing burdens, enduring all things until even his brave patience failed; then, once, twice, and again, we note his abandonment to fits of desperation, his wild plunge into Jacques' his savage revenges, and his retribution.

The French peasant appears to have been the most wretched type in Europe. Neither the Germans, nor Italians, nor the English "mud-sills" as he was degraded, oppressed and abused. It took centuries of inhumanity to breed the tigerish ferocity which flamed out in the Revolution—centuries to establish the bitter, fathless hate which resulted in the massacre of the aristocracy. Until the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the pressure of the peasantry never relaxed.

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